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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 AMMAN 004807

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SESAME-SOWING THE SEEDS OF REGIONAL SCIENTIFIC
COOPERATION?

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Second SESAME (Synchrotron-Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East) Council meeting, hosted in Istanbul in mid-July, yielded a productive discussion among the regional members on key issues such as upgrading of the synchrotron machine, future scientific programs, training, and finance/administration. Both Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates officially joined SESAME since the last meeting in January, increasing membership to nine but doing little to raise more funds—a recurring and troublesome stumbling block to SESAME's future development. Discussion of Libya's request for observer status was postponed to accommodate the U.S., though not publicly stated thus. Israeli participation in SESAME, while generally accepted, still acts as a lightning rod for heated discussion. EU funding still has not been secured, but SESAME leadership remains hopeful that \$10-15 million may be forthcoming. SESAME and UNESCO are entertaining the idea of a Washington roadshow/doorknock to "market" the project and drum up U.S. financial support. Finally, on a separate but related matter, UNESCO Director Nalecz confided to us that UNESCO had been blindsided by the return of the U.S. to the organization and had mishandled the consultation process with Washington about future U.S. contributions to UNESCO. END SUMMARY.

A NEW MIDDLE EAST RIPE FOR SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION

12. (SBU) July witnessed the Second SESAME Council meeting, an event that was arguably more productive than previous gatherings because of the concrete status reports and plans of action delivered by committee chairmen on the project's scientific, technical, financial, administrative, and training components. SESAME Chairman, Herwig Schopper, delivered an upbeat opening statement, welcoming new members Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates and charging the member countries to make SESAME a reality and "not just a virtual laboratory." "The new political situation in the Middle East region offers SESAME new opportunities to promote science and encourage regional cooperation," he announced. On the margins, there was talk of inviting the Iraqis to join, once a government was in place.

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

13. (SBU) The U.S. received a special acknowledgement for moving quickly to become SESAME's first official observer. SESAME is awaiting official membership decisions from Morocco and Greece, both formerly on the Interim Council, and will approach Muscat about Omani membership. The current official members are Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestinian Authority, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

14. (SBU) Schopper described Libya's request to become an observer of SESAME as a "delicate point" for some countries and moved to postpone any discussion until all had a chance to consult with their respective governments. On the margins of the meeting, Schopper confided to NEA Regional Environment Officer that he had deferred any decision on Libya as a gesture to Washington, but asked that the State Department determine its position on this by the next council meeting in December. The Israeli delegation told us separately that their government had no objections to Libya becoming a SESAME observer.

BRICKS AND MORTAR AND MONEY

15. (SBU) Thanking the Jordanian government for completing the contracting on the construction of the facility, Schopper shared his hope that a tangible symbol of the

project would help to propel SESAME forward. Nevertheless, he underscored the need to make the project operational by securing funding for the upgrade of the synchrotron light machine and the beamlines, as well as recruiting and training staff. Schopper appealed to the member states to convince their governments, politicians, and publics that SESAME is a project worthy of support. "I don't think that an annual \$50,000 contribution will suffice-each member state should expect an increase in annual contributions," Schopper warned at the outset, underscoring SESAME's greatest challenge.

16. (SBU) The EU remains uncommitted to funding SESAME and the EU 2004 budget reportedly has already been allocated elsewhere, but Schopper remains hopeful. Because the SESAME facility is physically located in Jordan, it was decided that Amman should raise the issue of EU funding in its bilateral consultations with Brussels. Jordanian Education Minister Toukan confirmed that his government is already in close contact with the EU about SESAME. While "things are looking positive, no decisions have been made" and Jordan will continue its lobbying efforts, Toukan added.

17. (SBU) Herman Winick of Stanford University remarked that a positive EU evaluation might influence any future U.S. decision to support SESAME. Winick added that he continues to work on the export licensing requirements and transportation options with DOE and DOC for the excess dismantled equipment from his lab. He reported for the first time that other U.S. labs and facilities would have the first right of refusal to Stanford's decommissioned light machine. Schopper reported that the technical committee had redesigned the machine to upgrade the power from 2GeV to 2.5GeV, as recommended by an EU evaluation team-a move designed to curry favor with Brussels.

18. (SBU) The beamlines committee report concluded that, in addition to the approximately \$12-15 million needed for upgrading the machine, beamlines were also likely to increase the development costs of SESAME. The chairman estimated that three beamlines would require about \$16.5 million, while five beamlines would require upwards of \$20 million. The French observer reiterated his offer from January that beamlines may be available from a light source being dismantled in France in the December 2003 timeframe.

CART BEFORE THE HORSE?

19. (SBU) On a positive (but possibly premature) note, the scientific committee reported that it had already received about 50 excellent scientific proposals requiring use of the SESAME machine. These were in myriad scientific, medical, environmental, and archaeological fields. According to the chairwoman, it was a "promising start for the users community."

110. (SBU) On training and capacity building, the respective committee raised the recurring problem of training regional scientists who later migrate to other institutions because SESAME is not yet up and running. Schopper encouraged member states to become more aggressive in pursuing training opportunities. For example, money provided by IAEA for training remains unused and a Brazilian offer to train three scientists has only elicited a sole nominee from Jordan to date.

REGIONAL HOT SHOTS; REGIONAL POT SHOTS

111. (SBU) One of two political flaps that transpired during the SESAME meeting was over the location of the next training session. In what could be described as either an unintentional shortsighted blunder or a deliberate attempt to isolate a member country, the training committee, chaired by a scientist from Iran, recommended Isfahan, Iran. The Egyptians quickly supported the suggestion; however, the Israeli delegation protested, citing their inability to travel to Iran. After a brief and somewhat heated discussion, it was agreed that the Israelis would attempt to apply for Iranian visas, since SESAME fell under a UNESCO umbrella which may provide some cover, with the understanding that if not issued another site would be identified for the training.

112. (SBU) The second contentious issue was a pointed comment by the Palestinian delegation about its good track record in meeting financial contribution requirements while their Israeli neighbors have thus far not ante-ed up. The Palestinians were quick to point out that they had complied under difficult political and economic circumstances and questioned more broadly why other member states were delinquent. The charge didn't seem to resonate, as many of the participating countries are guilty of not contributing

their \$50,000 annual dues.

ON THE ROAD WITH HAT IN HAND

113. (SBU) Financing remains a major sticking point for SESAME. The 2003 budget is only about \$350,000 but seems sufficient for what the project is doing at the moment. On the topic of getting donor support for SESAME, Director of UNESCO's Division of Basic and Engineering Sciences Maciej Nalecz (with broad support from the member countries) suggested that he and Schopper do a "road show" to Washington to pitch SESAME to U.S. policymakers with an eye toward getting an earmark from expected U.S. UNESCO funds. Possible appointments include the Secretary's Science and Technology Adviser Dr. Norm Neureiter and OSTP Director Dr. John Marburger. According to Nalecz, Dr. Marburger visited UNESCO in April, at which time he was briefed on SESAME and expressed interest. Nalecz also met with Dr. Kathy Olsen, Associate Director for Science at OSTP in late June to discuss U.S. re-entry into UNESCO. According to him, Olsen indicated that Washington was looking to fund the International Oceanographic Commission and satellite monitoring of climate change. Nalecz requested SESAME also receive priority attention.

UNESCO OFF BALANCE

114. (SBU) On the separate but related subject of the return of the U.S. to UNESCO, Nalecz separately shared with us some thoughts and concerns. He said that UNESCO was "caught off guard" by the U.S. announcement last fall by the President at the UNGA. Since then, he admitted, UNESCO has not done a good job of consulting with Washington about future U.S. contributions. He said that UNESCO officials assumed that the U.S. contributions would expand the current UNESCO budget; however, he has since learned that Washington plans to contribute its UN dues formula as a percentage of the current UNESCO budget. Effectively, there will be no increase in UNESCO funding, just a reapportionment of contributions. Nalecz said the UK has the most to benefit from the return of the U.S. to UNESCO, as its financial burden will drop the most significantly. Other countries will also benefit, as their contributions will also drop in real terms. He wryly said that Washington had gained positive public relations for returning to the organization, but not increasing the UNESCO budget. Moreover, he thought this approach would likely have the full backing of the poorer nations, as their contributions would be reduced. Finally, Nalecz lamented the fact that UNESCO would effectively face a nearly \$100 million shortfall--the \$67 million expected from the U.S. (over the next two years) would not be supplementing the current UNESCO budget, and the approximately \$30 million extra budgetary funds from Washington--for which he was very grateful--even when it wasn't a UNESCO member he expected to go away.

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